175 Baangoni had to give up their plan to subjugate the Babembas. They turned towards Tabora. After their victory over the Baangoni, the Babemba on the other hand, carried the war into the territories of their cowardly neighbors, whom they subjugated and ruled with an [797] iron hand. When Mgr. Dupont came to the terrible kingdom of the Babemba for the first time, the tribe had established its rule over a territory which was twice the size of the present Vicarage. The neighboring tribes would tremble at the mere mention of the word [648] Babemba. Even today we can hear songs cursing the cruelty of the Babemba among the tribes of Tanganyika and Broken Hill.

161 The present population of the Babemba is about 100, 000. The wars of the past have decimated them.

● 181 The most outstanding characteristic of the Babemba is that they are a war-like tribe to the highest degree, dreaming only of pillage, battle, submission of neighboring tribes, imposition of overburdening tributes, expansion and aggrandizement of the kingdom, but all this by means of a civil and military organization which is indeed remark- [157] able. The Babemba are one of the most intelligent races of Africa. [193] They have an exceedingly rich language including more than 20, 000 [538] words; they have a literature of their own consisting of martial poetry, songs of all kinds, more than 1500 proverbs, several hundred riddles, about a thousand axioms, etc.; a treasure bequeathed by their ancestors

157 In mining centers the Babembas are known for their keenness [zeal], their polite manners, their respect for authority, and their spirit of initiative.

484 My picture would not be complete if I did not mention the fact that the Babemba of today are perhaps the greatest adventurers of Central Africa. You meet Babemba everywhere. There are Babemba in Zanzibar, Panda, Lindi, Bulawayo, in Broken Hill, the Belgian Congo, in Transvaal and on the Cape. The Mubemba does not find it difficult to move; he can take care of himself, and he is at home everywhere.

584 ENGAGEMENT [Kukobeka]: Engagement takes place at an early age, around ten or twelve years, when the young betrothed are not yet nubile [amabele tayalakula]. [21]

Consent: An emissary [Shibukombe], who does not belong to the clan of those who wish to become engaged, is chosen. He is a man who enjoys a certain amount of prestige in the village and can speak out

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

124 weighing of food and other records of the same type could no doubt have been made with the aid of an interpreter, but the general anthropological study, on which I was principally engaged, necessitated considerable linguistic knowledge, and on the nutritional aspect I had to be able not only to question natives but to listen to their talk when eating and drinking, and to participate in their domestic life.

I travelled with two servants, both members of the tribe, a cook and a small boy, and occasionally invited notables, royal women or members of the chief's council to go on journeys with me to make contacts easier.[1] I moved by bicycle and carriers, but dismissed the latter on arrival at each village in order not to disturb the ordinary course of village life more than necessary. It was superficially easy [181] to mix with the people and join in their activities, since they are naturally courteous and have a great tradition of respect for authority. I was evidently considered an economic asset to a village[2] and a source of amusement and interest in a rather uneventful life, and was therefore tolerated, and even welcomed, from the start, in huts and on expeditions to gardens or fishing pools. The women, with whom I spent the greater part of the day, were far less in awe of the European than the men, who had so much more practical experience of the white man's power. But time served to show the deep reticences of the people, especially with regard to their ritual life. I was only able to attend religious ceremonies after considerable difficulties, and when I had finally won the confidence of the Paramount and other chiefs. These difficulties do not concern us, however, in the present book, since when discussing their foods and their gardens the people were ready and even enthusiastic informants. But there is no doubt that in an area where the only white people consist of three main classes—Government officials, missionaries, and traders—and where the tribe itself is organized on an autocratic basis, the anthropologist will find it impossible to be treated as an equal by the natives. I was able to

[1] I believe educated natives could have been used to keep many of the records, but the standard of education is backward in this area compared to that in S. and E. Africa, and I was only able to find one who could help me for two or three months.

[2] I never paid for information, but I bought native produce, employed people occasionally, distributed snuff, meat, and occasionally beer, and also gave elementary medical help, and presents to chiefs or headmen as tribal etiquette demanded.

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

177 big as Wales, and here a small native hospital has been built. There is also a Mission doctor and hospital at Lubwa. Bemba agricultural methods are practically untouched. There are now two Government agricultural officers devoted to research in native agriculture, but during my visit there were none at all.

Character.

000 The temperamental characteristics of a primitive people are as important as their environment and social organization in determining the nature of their food-production, and to some extent, of course, each is a function of the other. But unfortunately it is just these temperamental traits that are so difficult to describe objectively. Until some more scientific criteria have been evolved the observer is bound to rely on his personal judgement and impressions. He thinks probably in terms of crude contrasts between the behaviour common in his own culture and that in the society he is studying, or if he is lucky enough to have a wide experience of a number of tribes in one area, he can make what are probably more fruitful comparisons between the reactions of each different people to a common situation, such as their behaviour towards the European or their power of adaptation to our civilization. Such broad comparisons are, I believe, the best way of describing the temperamental traits of a particular tribe at the present time. I shall therefore limit myself here to a summary of the comments usually made on the Bemba by Europeans who are familiar with several different tribes in this district, and add my own comparative observations of Bemba and Bisa characteristics made during a short visit to the latter people.

Moffat Thomson in his survey of the tribes of this area describes the Bemba as cheerful and light-hearted, and the same traits are mentioned by Gouldsbury and Sheane, but gaiety has for so long been considered a characteristic of the negro race in general that it is difficult to regard this as a specifically Bemba trait, although I admit that my first impression of a Bemba village was one of constant vivacity, chatter, and quick laughter, and it remains to this day my most permanent memory. It was rare to see a nervous worried face, although as many African observers have noticed, the old people when in repose sit for long periods in silence with a fixed expression of extreme sadness and almost disillusion.

More interesting from a comparative point of view are the

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

statements of missionaries in charge of boarding-schools which take pupils from different tribes, or from compound managers in charge of mixed compounds on the copper belt. These seem to agree that the Bemba are bad at hard, continuous work, but good at tasks for which daring or sudden exertion is required. Among the highly paid employees on the more dangerous underground work at Wankie coal-mine, Bemba-speaking natives are in the predominance. In urban areas they are football enthusiasts, almost maniacs, but whether in mine or in school they are said to lose interest in any task at which steady day-to-day work is required. Whether this is an innate temperamental trait or whether it is a habit of mind dependent on strong warrior traditions it is impossible to say, but it certainly affects the whole nature of this people's agricultural work, as will be seen. (Cf. 'The will to work', Chap. XIX.)

In their relations to others the Bemba are considered to be touchy and quarrelsome. At Luanshya mine, to give only one instance, it has been found necessary for the Bemba wives to draw their rations in a separate queue in order to avoid disputes with the women of other tribes. This reputation for quarrelling may be due to the quickness with which the Bemba seem to flare into rages and then suddenly cool, but it is also probably associated with their strong tribal tradition of superiority to the other tribes on the plateau. This expresses itself in countless ways. On one occasion the boys at Lubwa training school left in a body for their villages, because they discovered they had been ranked after one of the 'subject' tribes in a competition for tidy dormitories. At the mines trouble is caused by Bemba hurling too freely the epithet of 'slave'. But besides their aggressive attitude to members of other tribes, the Bemba are quick to take offence amongst themselves. They are obsessed with problems of status and constantly on the look-out for their personal dignity, as is perhaps natural in a society in which so much depends on rank. All their human relationships are dominated by the rules of respect to age and position, and I should hazard a guess that more quarrels were caused by imagined slights than by material damage of any kind. It is probably this universal acceptance of the rights of rank that makes the Bemba appear so submissive and almost servile to the European compared to some of the more democratic tribes such as the Bisa or the Inamwanga. Arrogant towards other tribes, and

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

181 Arrogant towards other tribes, and
609 touchy towards their fellows, they seem to endure in silence any kind of treatment from a chief or a European.

181 To my mind their most attractive characteristics are quick sympathy and adaptability in human relationships, an elaborate courtesy and sense of etiquette, and a great polish of speech. A day spent at the Paramount's court is apt to make a European's manners seem crude and boorish by contrast. In ordinary intercourse the Bemba strike one as more sophisticated and civilized than the neighbouring Bisa, but much less sensible, hard-working, and efficient in managing their practical affairs.

Country and Climate.[1]

131 A glance at the Tribal map will show that the Bemba proper only inhabit the central portion of the country over which the Cibemba-speaking peoples are scattered. The natural boundaries of this Greater Bembaland are: Lake Tanganyika on the North, Lake Bangweolu to the West, and the escarpment of the Luangwa valley rift to the East. Only to the South is there no geographical boundary and the same type of forest extends almost uninterruptedly from Mpika to Broken Hill, 350 miles away.

133 The Bemba country is generally described as the 'Great plateau' of Northern Rhodesia. Crossing the country from the west to the east one seems to be moving over a series of tablelands tilted and bent into different shapes. Two or three days walk from the main escarpment to the East the general undulating character of the 'plateau' comes to an end in a succession of lesser scarps until one descends to the Luangwa escarpment proper. Natives are so impressed by this terrific natural boundary that they have been known to make a special journey to gaze down on the Luangwa valley from the *Mucinga Lubemba*—the 'great wall of the Bemba country'.

The country is very well watered. The divide is on the North-eastern side of the area. Streams to the east of this flow into the Zambesi, by way of the Luangwa, those to the west belong to the Congo system. The Chambesi, a broad still river that crosses the Bemba territory from the Northern border to the South-west is the most significant landmark in native eyes,

[1] Mrs. Gore-Browne drafted these first four paragraphs for me. *Vide* also A. G. Ogilvie, 'Co-operative Research in Geography; with an African example', *British Ass. for Advancement of Science*, Section E, 1931.

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

221 512 464 his wages. But the Bemba has either to pay 35*s.* for a lorry passage home or he must bicycle or walk. The first is considered a prohibitive passage, except for the better-off native, and the second is only done when a man is really sick of the town and feels he must get home—say after two or three years or even longer. He cannot reasonably return every year for the three months' garden labour which we have reckoned as necessary with the present method of cultivation. However, it can be seen from the table on p. 315 that, if a man spent two years at home, he could make millet gardens and fence them in successive years. He could then spend two years at the mines, leaving his wife to plant the third-year millet. She would thus have some millet every year if her husband had facilities for returning again in the fourth year, but this is obviously only one of the minimum solutions described above. For an improved food-supply an alternative method to tree-cutting or greater ease of transport to and from the mines are required.

The Will to Work.

461 At the opening of this book I described Bemba diet as inadequate and variable, and their methods of gardening as primitive compared to those of their neighbours. In some of the succeeding chapters I have tried to account for the shortage in their annual and daily food-supply by describing the people's difficulties in preparing and producing different foodstuffs, or in their methods of handling, distributing, and storing them. We have still to ask one final question, and its answer is to be found scattered here and there throughout the book. Put crudely, it is the query which springs naturally to the mind of most Europeans living in this area, viz. 'If the Bemba go short of food so often, why don't they work a good bit harder and drink less beer?' Successive Government reports describe this tribe as 'poor agriculturists' or 'incorrigibly lazy',[1] and the traveller, gazing at ill-weeded gardens and broken-down fences, cannot resist the same type of comment. The average working day of a man has been estimated as only four hours, even though the women are undoubtedly overworked at certain seasons of the year, and I have given a good many facts to show

[1] e.g. the Government Report for Native Affairs, 1936, p. 47. 'Natives in this Province generally speaking strike one as singularly unenterprising and indeed downright lazy about the growing of foodstuffs.'

2:Richards F-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

and therefore not a stimulus to exert their last ounce of energy to alter an intolerable state of affairs. Living at this particular economic level, other advantages sometimes seem preferable to a sufficiency of food. For instance, the immediate disadvantage of grinding and pounding to a tired woman may seem more obvious than the ultimate weakness she knows she will feel if she goes without her evening meal (cf. pp. 104–5). In fact, paradoxically enough, it would seem as if the 'fatal resignation' commonly noted among primitive peoples could only be cured by giving them regular food! It was certainly true that the few Bemba whom I saw displaying energy and initiative in the adoption of new methods of European gardening, planting of vegetables, &c., were natives who were better off, in constant employment, or somehow removed from the feeling of insecurity which was the habit of mind of their fellows. All these observations throw light on a fact which first strikes the European as puzzling, viz. the evident absorption of the Bemba in their food problems, which they discuss so constantly and with such interest, and yet their apparent insouciance in arranging to secure better supplies. Whether or not the Bemba are lazy through physical inertia, it is certainly true that habitual insecurity robs them of continuous energy in planning their needs.

The direct cultural drives towards food production are even more complex. We have here to deal with the dominant tribal interests, the activities with which prestige is most clearly associated, and the ambitions of each individual member of the tribe. This question is important. We want to know whether the Bemba were always indifferent agriculturists, or whether their present attitude is something specific—the result of economic changes at the present day. Now this group is always described as a typical warrior people, and though Bemba tribal structure is not based on military organization as is the case among the Nguni peoples of South Africa (Zulus or Swazis) and to some extent the Rhodesian neighbours of the Bemba, the Ngoni, yet it is true to say that the dominant ambition of their chiefs was apparently military conquest. To this end they strove to build up armies of followers, and collected guns and cloth and slaves. Their authority depended on military strength, as well as the people's belief in their supernatural powers. If they made big gardens, this was never their only method of getting food, and the cultivation largely served their

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

military objectives. Whereas some Polynesian chiefs regularly worked in their gardens and could not hope to succeed to this position unless they were expert agriculturists and craftsmen,[1] such a conception of chieftainship would be quite fantastic to the Bemba, among whom the royal clan definitely does not learn to cut trees, the chief male occupation of the tribe.

The same trend of thought seems to have dominated the interests of the tribe as a whole. Even now, when describing the past, the people constantly dwell on the fierceness of their chiefs, their military exploits, and the booty they were able to take from other peoples. In fact, *ubukali*, which may be translated 'ferocity' or 'ruthlessness', rather than bravery, is one of the few qualities I have heard admired in famous men of the past.[2] I noticed that if I ever criticized Bemba laughingly for their inability to carve or to make baskets as well as the surrounding tribes, and asked them what they thought they excelled in, the usual reaction was a throwing back of the shoulders and the word *ubukali* uttered with great intensity, 'But we were fiercer than all the rest. We made them give us tribute.' Gouldsbury and Sheane record that the Bemba of their day used to brag that they did not know how to hoe, for their only trade was war;[3] and though it is obvious that a people could not have lived on tribute alone, the boast is significant.

This tribal ideal is reflected in the Bemba attitude to industry itself. Talking to natives of the present day it is impossible to resist the conclusion that agricultural excellence is really not a trait which is much admired. To have food and beer is considered desirable and even essential to a man of high status, but it is always thought better that this food should have been produced by the labour of some one else. I never heard a young man being praised as a good gardener. The phrase *icilumba ca bulumendo*, the pride or arrogance of youth, may be said in tones of irritation when a young man refuses to hoe, but I think it is more often uttered with a kind of grudging admiration. In middle and old age the successful cultivator is thought well of, and without working he would probably be unable to build up a 'big house'. The word *umulimi* or 'good cultivator' exists and conveys approbation. But industry seems to be thought an unexciting virtue—an advantage or even

[1] Cf. R. Firth, *Primitive Economics of the N. Zealand Maori*, 1929, p. 164.
[2] Generosity and wisdom were the others.
[3] Gouldsbury and Sheane, *The Great Plateau of N. Rhodesia*, 1904, p. 24.

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

like the Bemba, matrilineal with weak matrilineages, and who have divided authority over the family and marriage by service and token transfer, there is little emphasis on premarital chastity. Marriage involves a test of the virility of the bridegroom, not of the virginity of his bride. After marriage however, the taboos surrounding the sex act are put in motion and the anxiety they engender remains constant throughout married life. The Ngoni bridegroom is certain of his rights in his wife once the cattle have been found for the bride-wealth. His lineage acquires permanent control over her reproductive functions; if he dies, he will be replaced by another lineage member. The Cewa man, on the other hand, contracts a marriage more easily and more at his own inclination; he gives his own labour for his bride, not the cattle of his patrilineage. But he never acquires full power over his children or full, let alone permanent, control over his wife.[1]

Gluckman suggests that there is a correlation between strong patrilineages and stable marriage.[2] There may also be an association between the strength of the lineage, the presence or absence of bridewealth, and anxieties expressed as taboos surrounding sex in marriage. Further work on this subject will have to be done before we can speak with certainty or even probability.

However strong the fears of the Bemba are, the way of escape from them is easy. The correct observance of ritual rules and reliance on the elders—the elders who preside over the chisungu and other ceremonies, and the chiefs who bless and curse—is sufficient. Bemba society is surely a 'shame' rather than a 'guilt' society, to use Ruth Benedict's terms.[3]

It is curious that the Bemba, whose marriages are trial marriages in their early stages, should express such a strong belief in the mystic links uniting husband and wife in the chisungu ceremony. Bemba men or women can leave their partners fairly easily, for there are no complicated marriage payments to be returned as there would be among the patrilineal Bantu. Yet the Bemba are

[1] Cf. M. Read, 'The moral code of the Ngoni and their former military state', *Africa*, vol. XI, 1938.

[2] M. Gluckman, 'Kinship and marriage among the Lozi of Northern Rhodesia and the Zulu of Natal', in *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, ed. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, 1950.

[3] Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, 1946.